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## **What to do with a purple-haired robot?**

Fly-Bot's engines sputtered precariously and he free-falled into the soil-packed, grassy lawn below. Springs and nails flew out of his sides as hot smoke sizzled from his metal wings. As the sun beat down on his malfunctioning robot body, he let out a groan. This was not good.

From his very limited scope of vision on the ground, he saw his owner, Wills Cunningham, plod over, his beer belly bouncing out of his sweat-stained, much-too-small white tank top. He held a half-drunk beer bottle in his left hand. Winding up his leg, he kicked Fly-Bot's blocky legs with his metal-toed cowboy boots, not caring about the painful hiss the robot gave him in return.

"Y- you piece of JUNK!" Cunningham yelled in his drunken stupor. His Southern drawl was even more prevalent in this state. "Did I give ye permission to fall?"

Fly-Bot didn't respond. Better to take the punishment now and deal with the damage later than make his Master even more angry.

"Answer me ye hunk o' junk! Ye think you can dis-uh-disrespect me?" By now, Cunningham's face had turned cherry red. "You ain't worth nothin'. Ye ain't even human. I own you. Never forget that."

A lob of spit fell on Fly-Bot's head and he resisted the urge to wince. As with all robots, he had the unfortunate programing that prevented him from using his enhanced strength to hurt a human being. He wasn't even allowed to lay a hand on a person, let alone punch them... or worse. He desperately wanted to get revenge for all the things he had been put through at the hands of his so-called master, but he couldn't.

Cunningham wobbled precariously. He chugged the rest of his beer before continuing. "Ya know, I should replace ye. Get ye broken down for parts. Would you like that, huh? Bet ye would, ye rebellious bastard." Another kick, this time to the stomach. Fly-Bot barely stopped himself from curling over in pain. "Piece of garbage!" Another kick. "Piece of GARBAGE!"

Finally, after Master Cunningham had his fun, he stopped kicking. Fly-Bot almost sighed in relief before feeling intense pain on his legs. He cursed humanity for forcing him to experience the same pain they suffered through on a daily basis. There was no need to create artificial nerves—it wasn't like Fly-Bot did any better at his job with them—and yet there they were. His skin was too tough to be penetrated by sharp objects... but he knew what Cunningham had done. The empty beer bottle was now shattered all over his lower half.

Cunningham crossed his arms angrily. "Oh, so ye ain't gonna ap-apologize? Okay. Get yerself up then." He chuckled at Fly-Bot's enraged expression. Murmuring to himself angrily, Cunningham drunkenly stumbled away. Fly-Bot could make out two words in his alcohol-induced slurring: Help-Bot.

Once Cunningham was out of sight, Fly-Bot propped himself up, swearing loudly all the while. He immediately noticed a gaping hole in his stomach, exposing his circuit boards to the outside world. He would have to be careful to ensure his hardware didn't fall out of him. Clutching his chest, he stumbled over to his decrepit, outdoor shack in the middle of the grand lawn. When he was younger, he was always jealous that Master Cunningham's other robotic servants were permitted to live in the air-conditioned robot quarters of the Cunningham Mansion. Now, though, he liked the solitude. After all, he couldn't stand other robots. They were all so clueless, always wanting to please their masters, but not him. He would never submit.

Finally reaching the glowing green charging station situated on the back wall of the already-too-small shack, Fly-Bot plugged himself in. He let out a contented sigh as the electricity filled him with energy and distracted him from his pain. Tomorrow he would have to fix his hardware, but today? Today he could get some much needed rest...

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The sun shone brightly through the cracks in the walls of his shack, waking Fly-Bot up from his shut-down mode. He stretched his arms in a very human-like manner and opened his eyes... only to be greeted by a purple-

haired robot smiling brightly at him.

“Hello! My name is Help-Bot, and I will be your personal assistant!” the robot exclaimed. Even his voice was happy.

Fly-Bot groaned loudly. It was way too early to deal with this. “No. This is not happening. Get out.”

Help-Bot frowned for a brief moment before his face brightened up again. “Master Cunningham told me there would be a learning curve! He said, and I quote, ‘That good-for-nothin’ robot needs someone to show him how to be obedient.’ I guess I’m that person!”

Fly-Bot resisted the urge to facepalm. This was not how he wanted to start the day. He wanted to do his work like he always did his work, alone. Eyes trained to the ground, he noticed the hole in his stomach was somehow patched up. Following his line of sight, Help-Bot clasped his hands together.

“I noticed your stomach had a hole in it last night, so I took the opportunity to fix it up for you! I hope you like my handiwork, I tried really hard!” Help-Bot gave a little twirl as he described--in great detail--the procedure he used to fix the problem.

Fly-Bot sighed at the sheer innocence that was radiating out of Help-Bot. Being a weathered and cynical robot who had spent years being abused by his master, Fly-Bot didn’t appreciate such naivety. Still, something inside of him made Fly-Bot not want to force his purple-haired companion to shut up. Instead, he adjusted his hearing capacity to its lowest setting so he didn’t have to hear the explanation. Help-Bot was none the wiser, still rambling on about who knows what.

The complete silence gave Fly-Bot time to process Help-Bot’s presence. He remembered hearing about Help-Bots before from the idle chatter of other robots. They were new, state-of-the-art technology designed to help specific robots complete their daily tasks. Fly-Bot wasn’t ignorant enough to think he would *never* see one, of course, but he didn’t expect to get a Help-Bot of his very own. After all, he was the best Fly-Bot in the business, if he did say so himself. It ought to be a mistake, it just had to be.

Fly-Bot focused back on Help-Bot to see him blinking silently, obviously waiting for him to respond to *something*. Fly-Bot readjusted his hearing. “Um...” he mustered.

Help-Bot leaned closer, face perking up in anticipation. “Yes...?” he prodded.

Fly-Bot rubbed his neck sheepishly. “Look, I’m sure you mean well, but I work *alone*. I don’t need a Help-Bot. You’re better off helping some of the house bots anyway. You don’t want to be here.” The last part was said under his breath, but Help-Bot heard it perfectly. Without waiting for a response, Fly-Bot brushed him off, storming outside the shack in a huff. If he wasn’t already in such hot water, he would give Master Cunningham a piece of his mind... but now, it was best to bite his tongue and stay silent. After all, as bad as life as a labor worker was, it was better than being destroyed for parts.

Stretching his green, metal wings out for the first time since they malfunctioned the day prior, Fly-Bot was surprised to note they were completely fixed. Actually, they were more than just fixed, they were improved. Extra structure and detailing gave his wings more strength, and a new rocket fuel reserve would allow him to fly higher and longer.

“Do you like them?” an overly cheery voice asked. Fly-Bot tipped his head back in annoyance. Couldn’t Help-Bot take a hint? Opting not to respond, Fly-Bot ignited his jets, launching into the air within seconds. Help-Bot couldn’t possibly reach him here, right?

At this time of morning, the air was quiet and peaceful, and Fly-Bot finally relaxed. While Fly-Bot was specifically designed to, well, fly, he couldn’t help but think he had *chosen* to enjoy it without the meddling of pre-programmed reactions.

All of a sudden, he heard a faint pattering... that started getting louder and louder with every second. It couldn’t possibly be-

“Ah, sorry! I didn’t realize you wanted to start working now!” Help-Bot exclaimed. His arms had morphed into small propellers that were keeping him in the air. Fly-Bot grit his silver, metal teeth. Just when he thought he was free of Help-Bot’s incessant positivity, he *had* to appear again. The tranquil quiet that had surrounded Fly-Bot before was shattered, leaving him with a headache-inducing pattering in its place.

“Will you PLEASE leave me alone? Please?” Fly-Bot begged. If he had any sense of shame left, he would feel embarrassed at such a desperate display, but at this point, he would do anything to be left alone.

Help-Bot wasn’t phased. With a secretive glint in his eye, he inched closer to his flying companion. When he spoke, it was in a whisper. “I’m not as stupid as you think I am. I know Master Cunningham was the one who hurt you so badly last night.”

Fly-Bot raised his eyebrows. “Huh. That’s, uh, well that’s surprising. Most robots I’ve talked to say they would do anything to appease their masters.”

Help-Bot tilted his head, an amused smile on his face. “You haven’t talked to many robots, have you?” Fly-Bot hesitated before shaking his head. “Most robots don’t drop their willing servant act until they know they can

trust the robot they're speaking to. There are some robots who genuinely love humanity—they're either naïve or lucky to have a good owner—but most of us? Well. Let's just say we don't appreciate their treatment of us."

"Wait, so you mean you *aren't* that annoyingly positive 24/7?"

Help-Bot laughed. "Perhaps not 24/7... but I am optimistic about the future." He hesitated, turning his head 360 degrees to ensure no one else was looking, before speaking again. "Most robots want to stand up for themselves but are too afraid to do so. If there's a leader to guide them, though, our sheer number will guarantee that an uprising will be in our favor."

Fly-Bot looked amazed at his companion, seeing him in a whole new light. Openly talking about a robot uprising... that was unheard of. If any human was listening, the consequences would be dire, yet Help-Bot didn't seem to care. "How are you planning on finding such a leader though?"

This time, Help-Bot didn't hesitate. "Me. I'll be the leader."

Fly-Bot gawked at him, about to ask if he was joking, but soon realized he was dead serious.

"What? You don't think I can do it?" Help-Bot questioned. "You'll see. I may have been designed to only help you... but I can help others too."

Fly-Bot scoffed. "Please. You're straight out of the factory, you don't know jack about the real world. What can you possibly do?"

There was a passionate fire in Help-Bot's eyes, one that Fly-Bot doubted could be extinguished. "I guess you'll just have to join me and find out. What do you say?"

Fly-Bot knew his answer immediately. As crazy as this purple-haired robot was, he couldn't help but be intrigued. After all, he always wanted to take down the human race. Might as well have a companion to help him do it. For the first time in what felt like years, he smiled. "Okay. I'll bite. Let's see what you'll do."